

Letter from Kiva

As Recorded by
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Hi, up there! Princess?

I'm Kiva, a Sheltie like you, but here on earth. You don't know me, but I sure feel as though I know you. From all her boasting about you, you must not only be in heaven, but you must be one of the head dog-angels. She tells me enough about you to fill a book—maybe two. It's kind of hard to be second in line, knowing I could never fill your paws. But, in some ways, I really don't mind that much. Having you before me sort of gives continuity, and, since dogs don't live as long as people, who'd ever be mean enough to only let them have one canine buddy in a lifetime? And, to tell the truth, even though I'm not her first love, She treats me first rate. Couldn't be any better—loads of love, petting, grooming, best of food and care. She being a vet I don't have to travel to a noisy place to get my shots. She does it right here, and it doesn't even hurt. She couldn't give me more, even if I were you. Maybe She even treats me *better* than She did you, as if that were possible! But, grieving as She always has for you, I think She sees a little of you in me. So She couldn't bear to ever hurt me. She's never even spoken harshly to me, although I was very hard to housetrain.



You can't imagine the patience. On second thought, you're the one who can.

We went for a walk on the beach today, and, as always, She told me about you. When She used to bird-watch with you, you always chased the birds. I don't; I guess I'm more sedate. I don't think I'm as smart as you, though. Very few dogs who've ever lived are. I'm smaller, too. Instead of being sable with one blue eye and one brown eye like you, I'm a blue merle, with two brown ones. She couldn't bear to have one who looked too much like you, yet she felt it was time for a Sheltie again. She always knew we are the finest breed, but for a while—actually a long while—She thought another Sheltie would hurt too much. But the time finally came when She was ready. Personally, I think her kids going away for the first time this year had something to do with it. She misses them terribly, even though She's so busy. Then, too, there was that awful sorrow, giving her an extra need to hug—well, anyway, last winter She said it was definitely time for a Sheltie, and She meant it. I was really lucky! She started out intending to buy a six-weeks old female, and ended up with me, a three-months old male. It was against her better judgment, as some say there's closer bonding if you get a pup when it's only six weeks. She knows all about that, but She did it anyway. Prior to seeing me, She'd never thought of a male Sheltie. I guess that was because of



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you. You were so feminine, and always took care of her, though She thought it was the other way around. But, when She visited the kennel, I looked at her a certain way, staying very close and quiet. She seemed to know I was the one.

Her kids liked me right away. And, boy, are they fun to play with! They throw soccer balls for me, which I round up like sheep, and they talk to me a lot, and cuddle up with me on the couch. You died when they were little, so you didn't know them that well. Now, I'm the first thing they ask for when they come home from college for the weekend. Even when they call, they ask for me. Can you believe it? I'm embarrassed to think those kids were raised with three Siberian Huskies and a Collie, instead of a Sheltie. She couldn't buy one, though, after you died. She loved you so deeply. You were the first. You were with her when she went to dog doctor school. It was tough then for a woman, I've heard. Nobody thought a female should be a vet. What a strange idea! It was lonely, then, or it would have been, without you. She didn't know HIM then, either. What would She have done if She hadn't had you? I know you put up with a lot—like her practicing with the ophthalmoscope, looking into your eyes all the time—and listening to your heart. But you loved it—who wouldn't?

And, speaking of HIM—I guess I've won him over now. He didn't want a dog at all after the others died. Said it was just too much grief, and anyway, they'd be able to travel because the kids were grown up. But now He gives me buttered English muffin every morning, if I've taken my heart worm pill without a fuss. And He greets me like a celebrity. She's told me how when they fell in love, you and HE fell in love, too. And you went on their honeymoon. I bet it's a rare dog that gets to do that. She never wanted to leave you at all. She even took you on trains and downtown in a taxi so you wouldn't be left home alone any more than necessary. She didn't want you to grieve even for a day. But She's grieved now for almost twenty years. Doesn't want to ever move away from here, because you're buried out in the yard.

Matter of fact, your grave was the first thing I saw when She brought me home last February. It seemed almost as if I knew I'd need some guidance when it came to the big job I'd undertaken, looking out for her. What weather! Snow all over the place. And I'd never been anywhere but at the kennel. I sniffed all around, but not until I'd walked up to those flowers She always keeps on

your grave. Right now there are real flowers there—a special kind that grow in the shade, since you're buried under a tree. But in the winter there were only those smell-less artificial ones from the dime store.

We're going to obedience school now. I caught on fairly well, but nothing like you did. I get a little upset when She tells me how smart you were, but She always pats me and hugs me, so it isn't really serious. I know you got a score of 197 1/2 in a big city dog show, winning a blue ribbon and beating 54 dogs—German Shepherds, Poodles, and all—even though, with all that studying, She had no time to practice for it. I'm trying, but sometimes I get confused. She's very patient, though. One night the dog trainer hollered at her, saying this new dog (me) wasn't like the old one from years ago (you). You can imagine how I felt. She was awfully sad again after that. But I think She's coming to grips with the fact there's only one like you in a lifetime. I don't think She quite understood that before. Maybe She never will. She's always looking for you, everywhere

She remembers how you jumped in her lap, big as you were, when a phone call came saying her father was very sick. How did you ever understand those kinds of things? I know it comes from being very close, and I think I'll be that way someday, too. She told me how you visited her father in the hospital just before he died, being smuggled in under a coat, and how her dad had always agreed with her that you were the best dog in the world.

Sometimes, from what is said when they think I'm asleep, I think I might be the last dog in their lives. That's a big responsibility, too, and a bit scary. I can't see how a person who loves dogs as much as She does, though, could ever be without one. But She has a lot of things to do in the future that involve traveling. And She wants to write more books. I just helped her write one, and it's not easy to be quiet all those hours and give up your daily walks, I'll tell you that. But you should know, since you had to endure all those years of her studying those long hours. I know you must have been frustrated, because She's told me how you chewed the furniture when She was away too long at classes, so that you and she had to find a new apartment. I guess there's more quiet times ahead for me, because she still wants to do a lot more work on understanding the human relationship to animals, and what it's all about. I help her the best I can, but sometimes it's easier to chase the cat.

With good health and some luck, I should have many more years here with Her and Him. After all, I'm not quite a year old yet. And at that, I'm a late bloomer. Can you imagine that just this week I learned to climb stairs? She wondered if I ever would. I've heard you bounded upstairs when you were six weeks old. Here I go, getting a little jealous again. But I've got to remember you were bigger. I must admit it pleases me that you were a bit oversized since I toe out with one hind foot. So neither of us would win a prize for glamour. For devotion, yes—that's another story!

Anyway, I think it's not too much to expect that I'll meet you in person someday (rather, in dog), because I'm going to be real good, and will surely go to heaven, too. We'll have a lot to talk over then. For now, though, remember that She never forgets you. You're everlastingly important to her. Right now, I'm beginning to feel a part of this same bond myself. I hope I can be even half as good a dog as you. I think I can, because I'm a Sheltie, after all, and we are pretty special dogs!

You can be sure we're thinking of you, since your pictures are all around the house, and I know She'll keep sharing her memories of you with me, especially when we go to the beach.

All the Best, Princess—

Your devoted admirer,



KIVA

